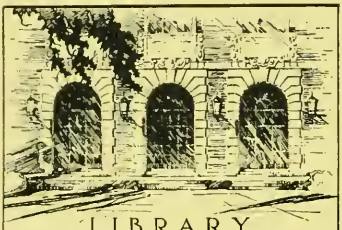

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ARCHDEACONRY OF OXFORD.

BY THE VENERABLE

CHARLES CARR CLERKE, B.D.

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CHARGE.

MY REVEREND BRETHREN,

If, in contemplating the duties expected from me at the present Meeting, I have felt more than ordinary embarrasment, (which I shall be at no pains to conceal,)—this has arisen from the multitude rather than from the fewness of the subjects which require on the part of the Clergy calm and deep attention, and which I conceive will give in the sight of future ages a characteristic colouring to the present position of the English Church. I venture to term it characteristic, not in allusion to any individual, or to any name, or to any party, or to any set of persons, whose unison of thought on subjects of moment in religion gives to them a distinctive character, but to the age itself, which, in other matters besides religion, shews itself to be not so willing now as formerly to be restrained by the energies of a few powerful minds, but to be stirring and enquiring, quick of intellect, open to excitement, craving for the fruits of learning, but impatient of the laborious means which the attainment of it demands. While therefore we are allowed to rejoice, that in many a case progress has been made in a straight and onward course, we acknowledge also, and that too without impatience or surprise, that

there have been wanderings great and various into those paths of error, whither self-will and an unsoundly instructed judgment are wont to lead those who have submitted to their guidance. Melancholy as it is, it is not unusual to witness, in public discussion or in private conference, things which we deem sacred or at least of grave importance to the Church, treated with little deference—false statements concerning them made, faults exaggerated, sound measures contravened, and that which we esteem to be full of the brightest promises opposed. Instances moreover have not unfrequently occurred, where a deep concern for the efficiency of the Established Church has been openly avowed, but where the object which these words are intended to imply has not been so clearly perceived, or the means of carrying such good wishes into execution so plainly discovered, as the anxiety, let us confidently trust, has been strongly felt.

Deep must be the thought, calm the reflection, and extensive the learning of him, who would reason on this subject now to any permanent advantage: a city set on an hill cannot be hid; nor can we, except with intense and painful interest, view the position in this country now occupied by the Church. Have we to maintain her principles, let us see that we do so on holy grounds: have we to seek protection for the rights and the property which is justly and unalienably hers, let us see that we do so not for personal advantages or for individual gain, but for the

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use of them in God's service, and for the promoting of His glory. If a few short years have worked an extensive change in the feelings of men generally regarding the offices of the Church, ought we not to examine her system with the utmost care, seek wisdom at the Fountain of all wisdom, and carry out, in a spirit of humility and self-devotedness, her duties, her spiritual privileges, her means and powers of doing good? If rapid movements be discerned in the distant approaches to our Zion, is it not time for the watchman to ask, Is it peace? But though there be many companies appearing, and much passing to and fro, yet that watchman fails in the discharge of his duty who sounds a false alarm, equally with him who omits to sound a true one; unless therefore there be amongst us judgment, experience, and discernment, and God's Holy Spirit guiding them, however much we may care for the edification of others, we may fatally mistake a place of peril for a place of refuge, and cry peace, where there is no peace.

I speak unwillingly, because unworthily and insufficiently, of the subjects which are now crowding before the mind of the English Churchman; not passing from its field of view again, like the dreams and fancies of a moment, but obtaining day by day more fixed possession, and expanding and branching out in many a case for good, and I lament to say in many a case for evil also; in the one instance, resulting in convictions that are sound and true, and in the other in persuasions that are visionary, enthusiastic,

and erroneous. There is, I have said, in all this something characteristic of the age in which we live. The common daily channels of public information are constantly setting before the reader's eye not only discussions on religion, but opinions also, theories and dogmas on Clerical duties, on the Orders of the Church, and on the injunctions of her Bishops; and though this novel habit be no matter for rejoicing, yet I grant that so general a canvassing of Church principles, and of the practices of the Clergy in the discharge of their public duties, is not without beneficial results. I allude to it, however, for other reasons. The constant recurrence of such discussions is a plain proof, not that the world is becoming more religious than formerly was the case, but that in religious opinions the minds of men are in a state of excitement and disturbance. The high and constantly throbbing pulse indicates not healthiness, but fever. Facts and events too corroborate this statement; difficulties are rising round the Clergy, which ten years back were scarcely noticed. If their existence was then perceived, their origin was not scrutinized, and their growth was not foreseen; in the midst of much that then appeared to be hopeful and encouraging, and on which we look back with gratitude; they were viewed as passing evils, unsubstantial as the motes with which the air abounds, and which nothing but the intense brightness of a sunbeam can bring to light. Whatever gave them life they have increased and are increasing, deriving strength from

the apparent want of harmony and agreement in our practices and teaching as Parish Priests. How wrote the Apostle to the Corinthian Church? "Now I beseech you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you; but that ye be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment. For it hath been declared unto me of you, my brethren,"—"that there are contentions among you. Now this I say, that every one of you saith, I am of Paul, and I of Apollos, and I of Cephas, and I of Christ[a]." If there be divisions among those that teach, there must be searchings of heart among those that are taught; if the voice of the shepherds be not as the voice of one man, we the Clergy must bewail it deeply as a heavy visitation upon this Church at the hand of Almighty God; and yet it is possible that the Church has by slow degrees been passing through a far worse state of things, and has been through God's mercy awakening from another error, a unity of habit, rather than union of mind, subsisting in similarity of practice, rather than sustained by strength of conviction, and which consequently speaketh neither hot nor cold. Our part is to weep over past ignorances, omissions, and neglects, to mourn as though perilous times were coming; to look to ourselves, considering that it at least is possible, that ere long, though the sword which tried the

[a] 1 Cor. i. 10, 11, 12.

ancient martyrs is in its sheath, and the flame which wafted their last words to Heaven is extinguished, yet that the integrity, the faith, the consistency, the devotedness, the secret of the heart of every Minister, of every one foremost in the ranks of the English Church, will be searched out and probed to the very bottom, and that in lovingkindness as well as judgment, because God is mindful of His Church in every land. "I will turn mine hand upon thee, and I will purely purge away thy dross, and take away all thy tin; and I will restore thy judges as at the first, and thy counsellors as at the beginning; afterwards thou shalt be called the city of righteousness, the faithful city. Zion shall be redeemed with judgment, and her converts with righteousness[b]." It may be otherwise, God knoweth; of the future we discern but little; our present duty is to live in that charity which respects one another's motives, and that patience which is the harbinger of peace.

I believe that I am speaking within the truth when I say, that never since the conclusion of the labours of those pious men to whose exertions we are indebted for the compilation of the Articles, the Canons, and the Liturgy of our Church, has there been more need than now of sound learning and sobriety of mind, a careful weighing of words and propositions, and an earnest application to the study of every thing that is precious in the writings of the worthy men of old, the ancient Bishops

[b] Isaiah i. 25, 26, 27.

and Doctors of the Church. And there is also abundant need of a patient consultation of the Divines of our own Church, who though they have long been numbered with the dead, or, to use an expression more congenial to our faith, though they have long slept, resting from their labours, yet do they still speak unto us in their writings as judicious expositors of the truth, forcible elucidators of the Christian faith, and able defenders of the principles of the Church. There is a wide difference between the knowledge obtained through the restlessness of an undisciplined mind, which constantly seeks after some new thing, and that expected from the Scribe instructed unto the kingdom of heaven, which brings forth from its treasures things new and old. Our guide is a "word behind us, saying, This is the way, walk ye in it, when we turn to the right hand and when we turn to the left[c]." Our teachers also are near, ever at hand; they are the promises which we made, and the obligations under which we bound ourselves when we became Ministers of the Gospel of Christ. In our public Ministry, therefore, and in our intercourse with all committed to our spiritual care and charge, we are, first, "to teach nothing as required of necessity to eternal salvation, but that which we shall be persuaded may be concluded and proved by the Scripture." Secondly, to "give faithful diligence always so to minister the doctrine and sacraments and the discipline of Christ, as the Lord hath commanded, and as this

[c] Isaiah xxx. 21.

Church and realm has received the same according to the commandments of God." Thirdly, "to banish and drive away all erroneous and strange doctrines, contrary to God's word." Fourthly, "reverently to obey our Ordinary and other chief Minister, unto whom is committed the charge and government over us, following with a glad mind and with their godly admonitions, and submitting ourselves to their godly judgments[d]."

If we be diligent in prayer and our reading be the Holy Scriptures, and if we receive the Articles and the Liturgy of our Church as concluded from them, and using them as in some sense a help to the study of the same Scriptures, we shall not fail of unity of teaching. Our commission in our respective cures is to teach simply what the Church bids us teach; to hold her language regarding Justification, the Apostolic Succession, the Holy Sacraments, the writings of the Fathers, and the mysterious counsels of God Almighty. We are bound to hold, that "we are accounted righteous only for the merits of our Lord Jesus Christ by faith, and not for our own works or deservings[e];" "that we be justified by faith in Christ only;" "that we be justified by God's free mercy and the merits of our Saviour Christ only, and by no virtue or good works of our own that is in us, or that we can be able to have or to do for to deserve the same; Christ Himself only being the cause meritorious thereof;" "and yet that faith doth not shut out repent-

[d] Vide Ordination Service. [e] Article xi.

ance, hope, love, dread, and the fear of God to be joined in every man that is justified, but it shutteth them out from the office of justifying." "Neither doth faith shut out the justice of our good works necessarily to be done afterwards of duty towards God, for we are most bounden to serve God in doing good deeds commanded by Him in His Holy Scripture all the days of our life; but it excludeth them so that we may not do them to this intent, to be made just by doing of them. For all the good works that we can do be imperfect, and therefore not able to deserve our justification, but our justification doth come freely by the mere mercy of God, and of so great and free mercy, that whereas all the world was not able of themselves to pay any part towards their ransom, it pleased our heavenly Father of His infinite mercy, without any our desert or deserving, to prepare for us the most precious jewels of Christ's Body and Blood, whereby our ransom might be fully paid, the law fulfilled, and His justice fully satisfied[f]." Secondly, the teaching entrusted to our care is that "from the Apostles' time there have been three Orders of Ministers in Christ's Church, Bishops, Priests, and Deacons. Which Orders were evermore had in such reverend estimation, that no man might presume to execute any of them except he were first called, tried, examined, and known to have such qualities as are requisite for the same[g];" and that those we ought to judge law-

[f] Homily of the Salvation of Mankind.

[g] Preface to the Ordination Service.

fully called and sent, which be chosen and called to this work by men who have public authority given unto them in the congregation to call and send Ministers into the Lord's vineyard, and that the authority whereby they execute the office of public preaching, and ministering the Sacraments in the congregation, is the authority of Christ, the commission under which they speak is the commission of Christ, and the name in which they minister is the name of Christ, and that an examination of Holy Scripture and of ancient authority corroborates this tenet, and demonstrates it to be of primary importance[h]. Our teaching, correspondent as it should be with the Service Book from which we minister, and with the Articles which we have subscribed, will speak of the blessed Sacraments as "effectual signs of grace," the one "a sign of Regeneration," the other "a Sacrament of our redemption by Christ's death." So that in the one instance, "they that receive Baptism rightly are grafted into the Church;" and in the other, "to such as rightly, worthily, and with faith receive that holy Sacrament, the bread which we break is a partaking of the Body of Christ, and likewise the cup of blessing is a partaking of the Blood of Christ[i]." Next we are called and sent to maintain that Holy Scripture is the sole authoritative source of faith, or, in words more familiar to us, they "contain all

[h] Articles xxiii. xxvi. and Preface to the Ordination Services.

[i] Art. xxv. xxvii. xxviii.

things necessary to salvation, so that whatsoever is not read therein or may be proved thereby, is not required of any man to be believed as an article of faith, or be thought requisite or necessary to salvation." The Church having "authority in controversies of faith, and being a witness and keeper of Holy Writ," holding this high office, and yet without authority to "ordain any thing that is contrary to God's word written, or so to expound one place of Scripture as that it be repugnant to another[l]." Finally, the revealed truths of the Gospel of Christ, in their length and breadth and depth and height, are especially and unreservedly committed to our keeping, and in obedience to our mission we do not keep back any doctrine required of necessity for eternal salvation through faith in Jesus Christ, but our duty is to instruct the people committed to our spiritual care and charge so wisely and so truly, as to bring them "to that agreement in the faith and knowledge of God, and to that ripeness and perfectness of age in Christ, that there be no place left among them either for error in religion or for viciousness in life[m]."

How much diligence of investigation is here needed, how much patient inquiring after the truth, how clear a discernment between the teaching which would either extenuate or exaggerate the truth, and that sober body of divinity which our Church holds stedfastly to be the truth, and maintains

[l] Art. vi. xx. [m] Ordination Service.

the same partly by explicit teaching in fixed and settled formularies, and partly by implication in her Services and Rituals of Worship. Invested as you are, my Reverend Brethren, with spiritual authority, and laden with special obligations as Parish Priests, you have in the present momentous crisis in an especial manner need of the exhibition of a cautious and scrupulous forbearance. Our public teaching in our parishes must be according to the ancient phrases, "sincere and pure[n];" simple, faithful, exact, complete, not assuming a controversial character, because controversy now unhappily agitates the Church, nor giving undue prominence to distinctive theological opinions, to the omission of the primary Articles of the Christian Faith.

I have reminded you, that we must banish erroneous doctrines, doctrines that are strange not to one or to another among the Clergy, but to the Church at large. It is consistent with the nature of a Church, it is necessary to her preservation, and it is agreeable to the vow made at our Ordination, to maintain, that the instruction which each one of us then received and the authority which to each one of us was committed does not extend to the pronouncing on our own judgment, uncorroborated, unsupported by recorded decisions of the Church, that a doctrine is erroneous or strange, although we may conclude it to be visionary or crude. There are matters in

[n] Vide the usual form of the sentence of Consecration of Churches.

which no evil has been anticipated from a diversity of opinions amongst the parochial Clergy, matters, for instance, connected with the future state of the visible creation and the present condition of that which is invisible. On all such points the parochial Minister in his public preaching to his flock will do best to imitate the prudence of our Church, believing fully that if ever controversy should force such speculations to become strange doctrines and arm them with results dangerous to the Christian faith, then as heretofore a faithful and true decision will be received from the College of the Clergy convoked to deliberate and authorized to pronounce a solemn dogma in accordance with the Holy Word of God.

I trust that it has been observed that I speak only of the public preaching of the Parish Priest among the people committed to his cure and government. I am not stating, nor would I presume to state in this holy place, what our duty may be in any other capacity under circumstances of emergency. The assent which we have given to the Articles and Formularies of the Church, when we were admitted to parochial cures, assumes them to be ever after, so long as we hold such cures, the standard of our preaching in such cures. "What they assert we assert, what they deny we deny, as far as they go we are supposed to go, and when they stop we go no further[o];" they are to us a pattern of caution on points that are mysterious, and reserve on those that

[o] Remarks on Clerical Education, by Rev. H. Raikes.

are not essential. If such a statement of the duties of the Parish Priest in his public preaching within his cure may at first appear to curb the imagination, yet it imposes no yoke upon the conscience; if it fetter the fancy, yet the liberty of the mind and judgment is not infringed; for he has already publicly declared that he has arrived at the same conclusions which the Articles promulge, that he has, by study of the Holy Scriptures, attained to that degree of conviction which their language naturally expresses, and which enables him to use it as his own.

I have now spoken of plain and general public duties of which perhaps we need to be reminded, lest we be carried among the turbulent waves of religious controversy, by the rapidly increasing current of public feeling. In touching on such a subject as I have done, I have, I fear, trenched upon the utmost limit of the province which is considered mine. Far heavier duties may be laid on many of us, than the mere patient unwearied teaching the parishioners entrusted to our care. Points of doctrine and matters of practice are now discussed among the lay as well as ordained members of the Church, which every Clergyman must view with anxiety, and which many contemplate with the utmost alarm. There is no fear for the result of temperate, cautious, and patient discussion of opinions, but a rash and headlong entrance into the field of controversy on important topics, is an earnest of and signal for desperate hostilities. Such an onset

attracts into the ranks both of friend and foe heart-rendings and mistatements, sometimes of an adversary's legitimate deductions from acknowledged premises, and sometimes of his sentiments and opinions. In such a case the very points originally under controversy are frequently misapprehended or lost sight of, and persons, differing one from another only in degree, have thought and spoken as though they were enlisted in an engagement for first or at least important principles. What I have said is, I think, exemplified in the present condition of the English Church. She is fearfully distracted by contests and hostilities amongst her children. Your attention must be called to them, for peace and truth and wisdom are at stake, and who shall guard these graces, unless they be committed as a standard to the keeping of the Ministers of Christ?

I am reluctant to speak even thus far on subjects so full of painful responsibilities to some amongst us, and of deep anxiety to all; and moreover circumstances have not so changed since the Bishop of the diocese addressed to us his Charge last year, as to make it requisite for me to detain you longer, than while I add my testimony to that of many others, to the truth and to the value of his words, which while they plainly brought to view growing errors, were considerate in their rebuke, and kind in the caution which they conveyed. I should now therefore, were I to presume to proceed to speak of opinions or of practices most commonly canvassed amongst us,

but deliver similar sentiments and advice in far feebler terms, without the authority either of station or of judgment, which gave to that Charge the weight and the importance which it has so deservedly acquired, not in this country only, but in our colonial possessions, and in foreign lands. The remarks which I have now offered to your consideration have been framed simply with a view to Ministerial labours, to our teaching the flock respectively committed to our charge. Conversant as we should be not only with the truth in all its branches, but also with the theories and opinions exhibiting every shade of error, yet the tone of our teaching and the manner of our stating truths should not betray the secret influence of favourite theories, but should be shaped according to the capacities and condition of the hearers. It is a knowledge of their errors, and an apprehension of the dangers to which they are exposed, which adjust in due proportion to their wants our inculcation of Scripture truths. And if relatively to the moral sense, the perception, the knowledge of others solemnly entrusted to our teaching, we, as occasion may require, enforce with more than ordinary earnestness, plainness, and frequency, some truths of the Gospel to the postponement, I will not say omission, of others, yet surely this is perfectly consistent with the conviction which all receive with reverence, that abstractedly, the doctrines of the Blessed Gospel are one whole undivided truth, composed of parts, each perfect, each,

like the visible works of the Creator, very good, each important; all to be received implicitly and in faith; all given by inspiration of God, and all profitable, in various ways according to various purposes, "for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness; that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works." It remains for us, persuaded as we are in our own mind of these holy truths, to labour to inculcate them on those who seek our counsel and advice with fresh earnestness and zeal and love year by year. When the wolf cometh the hireling fleeth, and the sheep are scattered. Be it our part to watch the signs of these peculiar times; and if clouds arise, though they be in the eyes of others but as a man's hand, yet let our prayers be earnest; for ourselves, that we fall not from Christian stedfastness, nor incur the hireling's guilt; and for others also, that in simplicity and godly sincerity we may earnestly contend for the faith once delivered to the Saints, as good shepherds, as faithful stewards, as vigilant watchmen, as men that must give account for the souls of others at the awful day of Judgment, at the disclosing of the secrets of the heart.

Pray we for ourselves, and pray we for one another, that our Ministerial labours when closed in death may be found in some sort at least a counterpart of that character which the holy Prophet gave to Levi and his priesthood, "My covenant was with him of life and peace; and I gave them to him for the fear wherewith he feared me, and was afraid before my name.

The law of truth was in his mouth, and iniquity was not found in his lips: he walked with me in peace and equity, and did turn many away from iniquity. For the Priest's lips should keep knowledge, and they should seek the law at his mouth, for he is the messenger of the Lord of hosts[k]."

[k] Malachi ii. 5, 6, 7.

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